

One man's opinion

By Chuck Hardaway

Brazil up close Part 2

Due to Washington State's proximity to the Pacific Ocean, much attention has been devoted in the past to trade with Pacific nations, while Brazil and the rest of South America haven't received the attention they deserve. Now, as a result of Lt. Gov. Brad Owen's trade mission and the signing of key memorandums of agreement with Brazilian officials, new opportunities have been opened up.

State Senator Cheryl Pflug (R-5th District) was a key member of the trade mission team and instrumental in what I believe was an extremely successful visit. My role as the commander of the Association of Washington Generals was to assist the Lt. Governor in establishing cooperative and friendly relations with key Brazilian dignitaries. During our mission, we conferred honorary Washington General commissions on seven top Brazilian leaders.

In my opinion the major stumbling block to Brazil becoming a successful trading partner with our state is the ideology of Brazil's government. However, I believe their somewhat leftist and bureaucratic attitude to business is changing, and they are recognizing the economic and social benefits to be gained from world-trade opportunities.

On October 29, a final run-off election was held to determine the president of Brazil. President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva won reelection in a landslide victory over the governor of Sao Paulo, Geraldo Alckmin. The reelected president was a former union leader who grew up in poverty, dropping out of school in the fifth grade. He was first elected to the presidency in 2002. During his first term, he extended welfare benefits to over 11 million poor families. In order to receive this assistance he made it mandatory that their children receive health checkups and attend school.

Under Brazilian law it is mandatory for every citizen to vote. Knowing our country's difficulties in achieving an informed voter rather than one who just pokes holes in the ballot and considering that Brazil has 22 million citizens who are illiterate, one could certainly debate the effectiveness of a mandatory voting law. In the end, though, one might argue the value of literacy in educating the voter after suffering through weeks of our own often deliberately skewed and deceptive political ads.

What, in my opinion, is not debatable and something we can learn from, are the actions taken by Brazil after the OPEC-contrived oil shortage of the 1970's. They, unlike America, have made their nation independent of outside oil. Through their use of sugar cane ethanol, Brazil has moved itself from an importer of

oil to an exporter of oil. One Brazilian official expressed my opinion to a T when he said, "It's stupid for America to continue staying the course when it comes to oil consumption, since the revenue generated supports many of your enemies."

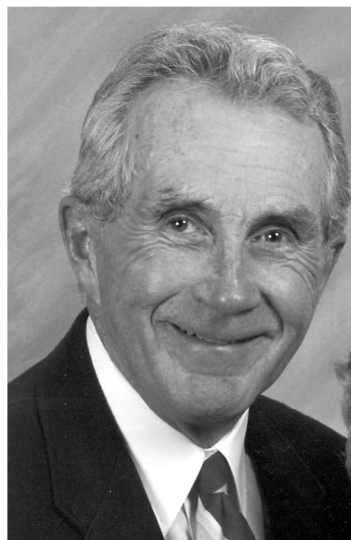
Evidently we are finally beginning to recognize this folly. James Carville's newest polling information indicates energy independence is the #1 American security issue. His poll asked: "Which of the following would you say should be the most important national security priority for the administration and Congress over the next few years?" The #1 choice, with 42 percent, was reducing dependence on foreign oil. A distant #2, with 26 percent, was combating terrorism.

In spite of its huge social and financial inequalities, Brazil is a nation of very friendly and hospitable people. Bill Center, a retired rear admiral, U.S.N., and president of the Washington Council on International Trade, was also part of the trade mission and observed in his blog, "The people here are calm ...VERY CALM. There is a lot of traffic but little honking of horns. There are long lines and crowds [but] little pushing, shoving, grouching or even frowning. They don't get upset about being a little late. Today is a holiday and people are actually taking the day off. And the stores are CLOSED! People are spending time with their families, it is 'Children's Day.'" In my opinion this is something we all should think about more.

There is little obesity in Brazil, and fitness seems to be an important part of the Brazilian lifestyle. However, after two days in Rio, seeing thousands enjoying the ocean beaches, I can unequivocally give this one man's opinion: Bikinis are for a very special few.

Here are a few other tidbits of information: Brazil is the world capital of plastic surgery. It also has a social divide greater than anywhere else in the world -- life expectancy for a boy in the ghetto is only 25 years. Brazil has the second largest black population in the world, behind Nigeria. Local crime lords rule much of Brazil. With 145 million Catholics, it's the largest Catholic nation in the world. The capital of Brazil is Brasilia. A large number of its 2.25 million people are employed by the government. Brazil is the world's largest producer of beef and has more cowboys than anywhere else on earth (six million work on farms with one-third making \$6 a week). Portuguese is the primary spoken language.

As for all the flying back in steerage class (14,000 miles), I find it evermore a torture chamber, and the passenger dress code is non-existent, as is passenger etiquette. On a flight from Curitiba to Rio, a female passenger took her shoes and socks off and put both feet up on the top of the seat in front of her.



Unfortunately for me, the 14,000 miles were like hurtling across the sky in a test tube of viruses and bacteria, resulting in a nasty cold upon arrival back home. I used to fly a lot but it's been awhile, and the struggling economic problems of airlines was obvious by the lack of airline cleanliness. From my torture-chamber seat, I was able to maneuver just enough to reach into the pocket of the seatback ahead, only to withdraw my fingers sticky with food-stuff from somewhere in the past.

In my opinion, Brazil contains a wealth of opportunity for Washington State, and Lt. Gov. Brad Owen's efforts have gone a long way in providing the necessary contacts and understandings for a smoother transition of future trade. Bill Center also expressed my opinion in his blog when he said: "Lt. Gov. Owen is more than earning his pay. He is a terrific representative for our State, a polished diplomat, a statesman and student of the world. I give him high marks, and he has earned them day-in/day-out." As for me, I was proud to be a member of his team.

Note: Most of the statistics I've used were passed to me by Brazilian officials. I believe them to be accurate, but they have not been verified.